



McGregor W. Scott
United States Attorney
Eastern District of California

Sacramento
501 I. Street, Ste 10-100
Sacramento CA 95814
Tel (916) 554-2700
TTY (916) 554-2855

NEWS RELEASE

Fresno
2500 Tulare St., Suite 4401
Fresno, CA 93721
Tel (559) 497-4000
TTY (559) 497-4500

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Contact: Rosemary Shaul (916) 554-2802

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**SUSANVILLE MAN CONVICTED OF MAKING
FALSE STATEMENTS TO THE FAA**

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that MICHAEL DENNIS PENNINGTON, 56, of Susanville, was convicted yesterday of four counts of making false statements on medical forms submitted in connection with his application for a pilot's license, as well as one count of theft of government property for receiving social security benefits to which he was not entitled. The guilty verdicts were returned by a federal court jury in Sacramento after a two day trial before United States District Judge Morrison C. England, Jr.

This case is the product of an extensive/joint investigation by the Office of Inspector General, Department of Transportation, and the Office of Inspector General, Social Security Administration. The investigation began in 2004 as part of Operation Safe Pilot, a joint effort between the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) to cross-check their databases for people receiving social security disability payments who were also being licensed to fly aircraft.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Carolyn K. Delaney, who is prosecuting the case, the evidence introduced at trial showed that PENNINGTON began receiving Social Security disability benefits in 1997 after being injured in a car accident. Thereafter, he submitted

medical forms to the FAA in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004, in which he claimed to be in good health. In fact, he was suffering from a deteriorating hip condition which ultimately required a hip replacement. PENNINGTON was working as a commercial pilot for Mountain Life Flight, Inc. beginning in March, 2002, and failed to disclose his earnings, approximately \$3,800 a month, to the SSA resulting in an overpayment of approximately \$37,700.

The defendant is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge England on May 29, 2007, at 8:30 a.m. The maximum statutory penalty for each count of false statements is five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. However, the actual sentence will be dictated by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of factors, and will be imposed at the discretion of the court.

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